

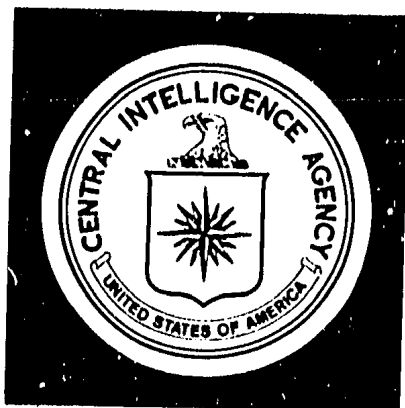
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Developments in Indochina



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The refugee problem in Cambodia is becoming increasingly serious. There are probably more than half a million in Phnom Penh alone, and more than 200,000 have chosen to remain in the provinces. Here they typically make up one quarter of the population in the provincial capitals still in government hands. To date, the government has been almost totally incapable of setting up and managing any program to remedy the situation.

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The South Vietnamese, according to the US consul general in Can Tho, have not adequately adjusted their military tactics in the delta to handle an active Communist insurgency. Communist main force units have broken down into small units of battalion size and less and keep government positions pinned down in defensive positions. At the same time, Viet Cong political forces have been proselytizing, recruiting, and conducting propaganda sessions.

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CAMBODIA

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Refugees

The fighting in Cambodia continues to create large numbers of refugees. Government officials estimate that in recent weeks the fighting along Route 4 alone has forced some 25,000 to flee to Kompong Speu and 15,000 to Phnom Penh. The government has registered some 335,000 refugees in Phnom Penh, where the population has doubled since the war began, but admits that perhaps another 200,000 are unregistered. At least 220,000 more refugees have chosen to remain in the provinces, where they make up one quarter of the population in provincial capitals still in government hands. An additional 20,000 Khmers have fled across the border to Chau Doc Province in South Vietnam.

Large numbers of refugees have been fleeing enemy-controlled regions simply because they do not like living in enemy territory. The enemy confiscates foodstuffs and moves large numbers of Khmer from one area to another, disrupting their unencumbered agricultural life and forcing them to adopt a less acceptable life style of burdensome taxes, collective farms, forced labor, and travel and trade controls. As a result, many Cambodians have apparently chosen to abandon their farms and livelihoods and take refuge in urban areas.

The government has been almost totally incapable of setting up and managing an adequate program to remedy the steadily deteriorating refugee situation, and it is still too early to tell if a newly installed minister of social action and refugees will be able to accomplish anything. The only relief thus far has been provided mainly by international and volunteer agencies. With one or two exceptions, however, even these have been slow in getting off the mark. Most refugees in

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the capital have been able to move in with friends and relatives or into the pagodas, but jobs are difficult to find and workers are severely underemployed. Food is scarce and expensive and some suffer from malnutrition and lack medical attention.

The deterioration of refugee living conditions is most noticeable in the half dozen civilian camps in Phnom Penh that house 6,000-7,000 people. These conditions have been aggravated by the current rainy season--living quarters are in disrepair, roofs leak, drainage is poor, and water supplies are inadequate. Acute overcrowding is typical of all the camps. Some progress has been made recently by a volunteer group at the Cambodiana camp in Phnom Penh, which houses 2,200 refugees, and was--ironically--planned by Sihanouk before the war as a luxury hotel.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

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Differing Tactics in the Delta

The US consul general in Can Tho has expressed some concern that the South Vietnamese may not be adequately adjusting their military tactics in the delta to handle an active Communist insurgency. He reports that government military units remain basically defensive in their outlook, largely as a result of being trained to react to possible large-scale Communist attacks.

Since the signing of the January cease-fire, Communist main force units in the delta have been breaking down into small units of battalion size and less. They have conducted numerous small attacks and shellings to keep government forces pinned down in defensive positions. While these actions have been taking place, Viet Cong political forces have been proselytizing, recruiting and conducting propaganda sessions to persuade people either to return to Viet Cong - held areas or to support the revolution inside government territory. There are few signs, however, that government forces are adjusting their tactics to cope with Communist small-unit actions and political espionage, according to the consul general.

Thus far, the Communists have not significantly expanded their influence in the delta, although they have made gains in some southern provinces, notably Chuong Thien, Kien Giang, An Giang and Bac Lieu. Most of these gains are in neutral areas with small populations. The South Vietnamese still control the key agricultural provinces where most of the people live, and it is unlikely the Communists will soon be able to reverse the government's dominant position in the delta.

The consul general feels that the government, by tailoring its defenses against armed conflict, is allowing Viet Cong political and financial operations to proceed virtually unchecked, and is proving relatively ineffective against the current Communist strategy of undermining from within.

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